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## Three Perspectives on the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election

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In anticipation of the 2024 presidential election, U.S. politics is increasingly focused on electioneering. Three perspectives on the upcoming presidential election are summarized below.

### Independents and the culture war

One of the more conspicuous features of recent American politics has been the political polarization between conservatives and liberals. As this polarization has increased, both major parties have sought to secure votes by presenting policies that appeal more strongly to their own supporters and adopting ever more extreme policies in the process.

The main axes of conflict between conservatives and liberals have been issues such as economic inequality and disagreements rooted in social values regarding gender, same-sex marriage, abortion, education, race, and gun control. This clash over values has been dubbed the "culture war". The culture war has been considered perpetual and difficult to resolve because it is viewed as a battle over which side's values reflect legitimate American values and, as such, the culture war has intensified political polarization.

However, the 2022 midterm elections offered new insights into the culture war. Abortion, which has long been recognized as part of the culture war, was highlighted as an issue in the midterm elections,

appealing widely to independents as an issue transcending partisanship. The issue of abortion captured the attention of women and young adults regardless of partisan affiliation, and they voted for the Democrats.

The history of democracy in the U.S. includes the process of minorities gaining basic human rights, and the U.S. Supreme Court's June 2022 overturning of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, which recognized abortion as a constitutional right, was perceived by independents, especially women and young adults, as a threat to their previously acquired rights and thus may have influenced their voting behavior as a form of protest.

In presidential elections, where a winner-takes-all system is used in the electoral college, victory is often determined by which party wins close states where the votes of independents are key. For this reason, it is extremely important to accurately identify trends among independents in presidential elections.

Social issues affecting the recent political climate that are considered relevant to the culture war include the state of public education, not least whether to force students to wear masks at school in the wake of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and whether to teach LGBTQ+ issues to pre-school children and students, as well as the June 2023 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that affirmative action favoring racial minorities is unconstitutional. The Biden administration has also been calling for stricter gun control measures in response to a string of shootings that have occurred since the start of the COVID pandemic.

Whether abortion and these other issues will be of broad interest to independents beyond the culture war framework and whether they can be properly incorporated into the agenda will influence the outcome of the 2024 presidential election.

## **Increasing presence of young people and the Democratic Party**

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The United States has a demographic profile that is rare among developed countries in that its population continues to grow. The latest census (2020<sup>i</sup>) shows an increase in population since the previous census, as well as an increase in the number of adults over the age of 18 who are eligible to vote. The younger segment of the population has been the focus of particular political attention<sup>ii</sup>. While there are various definitions of young adults, the voting behavior of the 18-29 age group, consisting of Gen Z born after 1996 and a portion of Gen Y (millennials) born between 1981 and 1996, is attracting attention.

The first reason for this is the high voter turnout among these young people aged 18-29. In the most recent national elections, the 2022 midterm elections, 27% of young voters turned out to vote, compared to around 20% for other generations. Young voters tended to vote at an even higher rate of 31% in the ten closest battleground states of Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, New Hampshire, Nevada, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

Second, there has been a noticeable increase in support for the Democratic Party among younger voters. Looking back at recent national elections, young voters voted 67% to 32% for Democrats and Republicans in the 2018 midterm elections, 62% to 36% in the 2020 presidential election, and 63% to 35% in the 2022 midterm elections. Support for the Democratic Party has thus been consistently high at over 60%.

In this regard, Democrats will likely continue to focus their campaign efforts on building support among younger voters and getting them to the polls in the 2024 presidential election. They have many differences in behavior and orientation from other generations, and it will be critical for the Democratic Party to analyze the policy issues that younger voters represented by Gen Z focus on as it prepares for the upcoming presidential election.

## The Republican Party or the Trump Party

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In addition to political polarization, intra-party divisions have also become an important perspective in recent years. For example, both parties have intra-party divisions: the Democratic centrist represented by President Biden versus the radical left personified by Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, and the Republicans and right-wing populists represented by former President Trump versus traditional center-right conservatives.

The Republican situation is perhaps more serious regarding intra-party divisions: the unusually long time it took the Republicans, who became the majority party in the House of Representatives after the 2022 midterm elections, to elect the Speaker of the House of Representatives is still fresh in people's minds. This problem stemmed from the long time required for one candidate to obtain the majority support needed to become Speaker of the House in the face of strong opposition from the pro-Trump faction of the Republican Party. Ultimately, there were 15 votes held to elect the Speaker of the House. This was the first time in 164 years that the House of Representatives had voted more than ten times, symbolizing the difficulty the Republicans were having in reconciling with the pro-Trump camp.

However, the situation surrounding Mr. Trump is fluid and requires close monitoring. For example, the conservative media outlet Fox News, which had long been vocal in its support of Trump, dealt him a clear blow when it began to distance itself from him in the spring of 2023. Fox News had reported that vote-counting machine manufacturer Dominion Voting Systems rigged the vote count to the Republican Party's disadvantage during the 2020 presidential election, and a lawsuit was filed against Fox News by the company claiming damages for defamation. As a result, Fox News admitted in April 2023 that its reporting had been inaccurate and settled the case by paying the company \$787.5 million. That same month, Fox News terminated its contract with star anchor Tucker Carlson, a well-known Trump supporter. These were no doubt hard hits for Trump, who remains adamant that the 2020 presidential election was a "stolen election".

Other Republican candidates besides Trump who have officially announced their candidacy for the 2024 presidential election include former Vice President Mike Pence, former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, Senator Tim Scott, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, and former Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson. It has been pointed out that the more candidates there are, the more the anti-Trump vote will split in Trump's favor.

In addition, Mr. Trump has been indicted time and time again since early 2023 but nevertheless remains in the lead in the race for the Republican nomination; a Reuters/Ipsos poll released on August 3, 2023 on the Republican nomination race showed support for Trump at 47%, followed by Florida Governor DeSantis at 13% and former Vice President Pence at 8%.

In March 2023, Trump was indicted on charges of falsifying accounting records to suppress allegations of a past affair in his bid for the 2016 presidential election, a violation of New York state law, and in June, charges of illegally keeping official documents containing top government and military secrets at his home after leaving office were filed under the Espionage Act. Shortly into August, he was indicted by a grand jury in the nation's capital, Washington, D.C., on charges that included attempting to defraud the nation with the intent of preventing Congress from certifying Biden's victory in the 2020 presidential election and overturning the results. In particular, the August 1 indictment was the second criminal indictment under federal law and the third including state law, and it has been suggested that this led to the January 2021 intrusion into the U.S. Capitol that attracted great domestic and international interest as potentially undermining the foundation of American democracy, the peaceful transition of power through elections. In this regard, Florida Governor DeSantis has spoken out in agreement with Trump that the indictment was based on a political agenda, while former Vice President Pence has criticized Trump, saying that Trump is entitled to the presumption of innocence but that anyone who places himself above the Constitution should not be president. Furthermore, Florida Governor DeSantis had by August 7 turned to denying Trump's claims that the election was rigged, definitively stating that Trump had lost the 2020 presidential election.

With the situation surrounding Trump in such flux, who will ultimately be the Republican nominee after the primaries will be an important indicator of the sustainability of Trump's influence on the Republican Party and of the future of the party itself.

## Conclusion

The U.S. presidential election, inclusive of the primaries, is a long race that can be compared to a marathon. It is unpredictable, with candidates' approval ratings rising and falling along the way and rising stars making their appearances. Although it is impossible to predict the outcome of the 2024 presidential election at this point, the debate over the U.S. presidential election, often termed a quadrennial political festival, will intensify. It is thus important to analyze the election issues dispassionately.

This is an English translation of a Japanese paper originally published on August 14, 2023.

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<sup>i</sup> U.S. Census Bureau

<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2021/population-changes-nations-diversity.html>

<sup>ii</sup> Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), Tufts University

<https://circle.tufts.edu/2022-election-center#abortion-was-young-voters%039;-top-issue-in-2022>